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Revolt of the Provinces: the Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945

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But as have most other Mexican immigrant studies of this period, the inquiry neglects a rich trove of Mexican government accounts located in archives in Mexico City.

While the monograph is indeed more exhaustive than any other work on this subject, promises of a novel theoretical approach do not quite materialize. Agency, for example, is present in previous studies—it was just not given that label. The book also leaves crucial questions unanswered. It seems that many Mexicans who wound up in Detroit could not bypass Texas fast enough. This was true for west central Mexicans, but it did not necessarily apply to immigrants from Mexico's northeast. Why would these latter not be as attracted by the industrial allures of technological prestige and higher wages? Could it be that Mexican northerners eschewed midwestern *colonias* in favor of Texas because they found the Midwest as uninviting as central Mexicans found the Southwest? After all, the industrial Midwest contained unfamiliar ecological and cultural arrangements, rampant unemployment, brutal police, and more intensive challenges to family cohesion. In many ways this explains why immigrant nationalism was more intense in the Midwest than in older communities of the Southwest. I suspect that there are more profound structural reasons for choice of destination than the pull factors described in this book.

Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945, by Robert L. Dorman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. xiv, 366 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL H. BORUS, UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

Little recognized today, the diverse movement known as regionalism was in its heyday between the world wars a dominant feature of the American cultural landscape. It tenuously linked such different tendencies as the California socialism of Carey McWilliams and the Tennessee agrarianism of Donald Davidson through its indictment of modernity as excessively instrumental, anomically rootless, and blandly homogeneous. Part aesthetic program, part social science, regionalism took its stand in the defense of organic communities defined by environment, common custom, and history at the moment when they seemed most imperiled by the capitalist reorganization of the countryside. Aiming to create a culture that meaningfully combined high ideals and humbler practices, regionalists put their hopes in the ability of the folk to combat the spreading malaise.

In contrast to the airy unrealities of genteel culture and the degraded numbness of mass culture, the regionalist notion of aesthetic

value as local belief and activity aspired to unite thought and practice. An aesthetic consciousness based on regionalist standards, its champions argued, could become a new "civic religion," which would guide human interaction along more meaningful paths. The effort to create and install such a culture led regionalists all across the nation to begin the recovery of folk beliefs, to rewrite histories in order to re-enchant the world, to chart the present-day contours of place, and eventually to organize to reconstruct America.

Robert Dorman's important, if overwritten, *Revolt of the Provinces* deftly traces the glories and ambiguities of the regionalist project. Extensively researched, the book sensitively and imaginatively draws together the multiple strands of regionalism. No other treatment demonstrates so thoroughly how the regionalists developed their love of the land, the depths of their regard for Indians as inhabitants of an aesthetic community in which objects were valued for themselves, or the intricacies of the regionalists' sense that the survey would spark in the folk the recognition that their own lives were subject to foreign powers. Particularly impressive is Dorman's rescue of such southwestern and trans-Mississippian regionalists as B. A. Botkin and Angie Debo of Oklahoma, Henry Nash Smith of Texas, and H. G. Merriam of Montana. In his hands these men and women take their rightful place alongside the better-known Nashville circle and the Regional Planning Association of America associated with Benton MacKaye and Lewis Mumford.

Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* will be especially interested in Dorman's handling of John T. Frederick, whose *Midland* magazine constituted the regionalist beachhead in Iowa City. Frederick's novel *Green Bush* (1925), the tale of an Iowan who forsakes a promising graduate career in Ann Arbor for a return to his roots, was a crucial example of the regionalist dictum that "a world in little" was the most promising home for humankind. More central to Dorman's story is the career of Nebraska novelist Mari Sandoz. Drawn to the promise of regionalism, Sandoz was all too aware of its deficiencies. Her novels about the mythical state of Kanewa revealed the regionalist overestimation of their cultural radicalism. In such works as *Slogum House* (1937) and *Capital City* (1939), she demonstrated how the movement's central postulates failed to account for the human capacity for self-deception and the limitations of the ideal of the individual proprietor on the land.

Dorman's own analysis follows Sandoz's. His is an account of how the regionalists' efforts to create organic communities propelled them into a series of delicate balancing acts. Regionalist histories and surveys walked a fine line between regarding the folk as victims of

modernizing processes and recognizing them as agents of the very transformations that the regionalists opposed. Regionalist politics never solved the problem of how to encourage the solidarity of the rural, native stock without making the populace fodder for nativist and fascist demagogues. Nor were regionalists ultimately successful in integrating diverse regional practices into a single nation. How the rural, racially based hierarchy so beloved by the Agrarians could coexist with the socialism advocated in the West remained a mystery. Naive about power, uncertain about how to regard the New Deal, which ironically paved the way for rationalized procedures in fields and forests, and blind to the appeals of mass culture for the folk, regionalist politics always returned to the aesthetic. It was, Dorman concludes, a utopian movement.

Dorman reinforces that judgment through an overly precious prose that makes the regionalists seem more dreamy than they were. Lacking the power to effect change is not, as Dorman sometimes implies, proof of inadequate analysis. Had he explored more fully the influence of regionalism on the Popular Front and the WPA Federal Artists and Writers Programs, the movement might have appeared stronger. Still, he is right to be attuned to its shortcomings and even more correct when he demonstrates how radical ecology groups such as Earth First! have abandoned the regionalist commitment to unique human communities.

Lou Henry Hoover: Essays on a Busy Life, edited by Dale C. Mayer. Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing, 1994. xv, 156 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$23.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY SUSAN ESTABROOK KENNEDY, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Fifty years after her death, there is surprisingly little published scholarship about Lou Henry Hoover. Until this year, only one biography, the work of a family friend, done without access to Mrs. Hoover's papers, had been written. Manuscripts were not available until 1985. Now Dale Mayer, archivist at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, has edited an enticing volume that begins to correct the deficiency, provides readers with an initial set of portraits of a complex and fascinating woman, and whets appetites for additional scholarly and popular investigation.

Born in Waterloo, Iowa, in 1874, Lou Henry migrated with her family to California a decade later because of her mother's health. She completed normal school before earning a degree in geology at Stanford University, where she met fellow Iowan Herbert Hoover,

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